

An interview with Leland Larrison ①

LELAND LARRISON

An Interview Conducted by

Jim Wright

December 8, 1980

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

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DATE

Name of narrator: Leland Larrison

Address: 1457 Locust St., Terre Haute, Indiana Phone: 232-8021

Birthdate: April 11, 1907 Birthplace: Amboy, Indiana

Length of residence in Terre Haute: 51 years

Education: Graduate, Amboy High School, Butler College of

Pharmacy, Indianapolis

Occupational history: Druggist and tax consultant until 1954;

tax consultant through the present; city clerk, 1963-67; mayor,

1967-71; county clerk, 1972-80.

Special interests, activities, etc. Golf, bowling, fishing,

making picture frames.

Major subject(s) of interview: Transportation in Terre Haute from

1930 to present, Republican politics 1963 to present, pharmacy

in the city from 1930 through 1954.

No. of tapes: 2 Length of interview: 2 hours

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Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
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Dec. 8, 1980	9 to 11 A.M.	County Courthouse	Jim Wright
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LELAND LARRISON
Tape 1
December 8, 1980
Vigo County Courthouse
INTERVIEWER: Jim Wright
TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly
For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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JW: I am Jim Wright interviewing County Clerk Leland Larrison. This is December 8, 1980. We are in the Vigo County courthouse.

Lee, how did you get started in your pharmacy?

LARRISON: Well, I was born and raised on the farm until I graduated from high school, which was at 18 years of age. Then I decided I wanted to be a druggist, because I knew a druggist at home in a small town and he had jewelry and he had a little bit of everything back in those days in the early twenties. It sort of fascinated me, and I thought I'd like to be a pharmacist. So, I left the farm and went to pharmacy college in Indianapolis.

JW: Where was this farm at that you were raised?

LARRISON: In Miami County.

JW: Miami County, Indiana?

LARRISON: We farmed about 230 acres, me and my dad, and I took a regular farm hand's place after 14 years of age; so I did plenty of work on there, and I was a little disgusted with farming.

JW: Why'd you set up shop in Terre Haute?

LARRISON: Well, I graduated from pharmacy college in Indianapolis a few months before I was 21 years old. I couldn't take the pharmacy exam to get my registered papers. I was also an assistant register at that time, which they had back in those days. They don't have them any more. And when I did become 21, then I had to wait about a month before I could take the exam, 'cause they gave it four times a year -- every quarter. After I graduated, then I took the exam and got my registered papers. I looked around for a better job, and I found one in Bicknell, Indiana. I went to Bicknell, and, you might say, fell in love with my present wife, who was music supervisor at the schools in

LARRISON: Bicknell. After about a year, she transferred to West Terre Haute as music supervisor there, and her dad came there as superintendent. So, I was driving to get into Terre Haute. Well, the nearest place I could get was Brazil. I found a job in Brazil that was open for Schultz Weinland Drugstore. That's back in the late twenties and the first part of thirty.

JW: What was the name of that drugstore again?

LARRISON: Schultz Weinland -- s-c-h-u-l-t-z w-i-e-i-n-l-a-n-d. It was one of the oldest drugstores in Brazil. They had a very good prescription business there, so I got a lot of experience.

JW: You eventually then got into Terre Haute. Did you set up shop at 15th and Locust?

LARRISON: The time that I got the job there . . . I was there just a little over a year. I was striving to get a job with Gillis. That was about the only main stores in town then. They had eight stores in the downtown area, but they wasn't paying as much as I was makin' in Brazil. So, eventually I got married to my wife, who was at that time over in West Terre Haute. And I moved over there and lived with her parents for about a year before . . . and during that time was when I bought the drugstore. I got a job with Arthur S. Shel Wright, who had a drugstore at 18th and Wabash. He along with myself . . . when he hired me, he told me that he was going to buy another store at 15th and Locust and he wanted me to manage that store. And I'd get a little more money there than what I was makin' in Brazil, so I was interested in the job. But I worked at 18th and Wabash for about two months while we was getting this store ready to open. We opened it up on July the first, 1930.

Then, the following year, he had some financial problems, and I bought the store.

JW: This was at 15th and Locust.

LARRISON: This might surprise people, but I bought it for less than thirty-five hundred dollars.

JW: No kidding?

LARRISON: You couldn't do that today.

JW: No. You talk about Gillis drugstores. You said there were seven or eight downtown?

LARRISON: There was eight in downtown.

JW: Where were they located -- these Gillis drugstores?

LARRISON: Anywhere between 3rd and 4th Street on down to 9th Street, and then there was one in the Rose Dispensary building, which is tore down now. And there was one at 7th and Ohio Street.

JW: Were these owned by the Gillis family that had the funeral home?

LARRISON: No. No, I think they were relation, but it was a different Gillis.

JW: Were there plenty of drugstores in Terre Haute during the Depression?

LARRISON: Yes, when I came here and started my drugstore, we had 43 independent drugstores, and that was mostly neighborhood drugstores. There was 430-some retail grocery stores strung out through the neighborhoods. The reason I know is because Hulman used to put out a catalog for salesmen who came in on the train or by automobile (which there was not too many then). Most of your salesmen still was travelling by train, and they'd give 'em this catalog so that they could make every store, you know. They usually made a route out of this little catalog that they gave that had all the drugstores and grocery stores listed in it.

JW: Did many of them go under during the Depression?

LARRISON: There were a few of them that went under during the Depression, and a lot of them got in bad shape and never did come out of it then. I was probably the youngest pharmacist that owned a store in town when I bought it in November of 1931, and I had a difficult time for the first five years. It was right during the Depression. During the time I was starting there was when the banks closed. The money -- what little I had -- was tied up in a

LARRISON: checking account, and [I] couldn't get it out. But I think, as I remember, we got about 90% back when they did open up.

JW: When you opened your drugstore at 15th and Locust, what items did you sell -- other than drugs? What was your store like?

LARRISON: Well, we didn't . . . at that time the drugstores didn't handle too much of a general line like they do now. Of course, now then you might say they're a combination store, you know. Most of 'em are retail outlets for various things. And the drugstore part is actually the pharmacy part [and] is actually more or less of a sideline, I'd say. But we depended entirely on prescription business and patent medicines. That was about all we had was patent medicines, and we didn't sell a lot of things that they do nowadays.

JW: You say patent medicines. What would that be?

LARRISON: Well, we had Hoyt's Compound which was made locally here. And we had (snaps his fingers) . . . I'm tryin' to think of the one that was vanilla flavor that was made over there on North 14th Street. I can't think of it . . .

JW: What would they be used for?

LARRISON: It was sort of a laxative and a cure-all. A lot of things back in those days was more or less of a multiple relief for various things. You could use it for this or that or other things, you know. That was back in the days when we still had medicine men travellin' around through the country sellin' like snake oil and all that kind of stuff.

JW: You say Hoyt's was made in Terre Haute?

LARRISON: Yes.

JW: What . . . how do you spell that?

LARRISON: H-o-y-t-s compound. We had Konjola. I can remember when Konjola came in here with a big circus-like thing and had a parade on Wabash Avenue and had a big deal with a band and everything out

LARRISON: in the area of Gilbert Park. And they had thousands of people 'round there. I don't know how many bottles they sold. That was a good seller for a number of years. We used to buy that by the case.

JW: Konjola. How do you spell that?

LARRISON: K-o-n-j-o-l-a. But on a weekend, it was nothing in a neighborhood drugstore, you know. People mainly traded on weekends. During the week you didn't have too much traffic in the neighborhood stores. But on weekends, you'd get a whole case of that and bring it up and put it on display and sometimes you'd sell the whole case of it. Or maybe even more than that, sometimes less.

JW: How extensive was your delivery service? You were known for your delivery, weren't you?

LARRISON: Well, I was just able to survive until about 1936, and then I started makin' just a little bit of money. And I decided that so many people didn't go to a drugstore only maybe once a week or somethin' like that. Well, I realized that there was a lot of things that they needed during the week, and I decided that I'd start a delivery service. So, I bought a three-wheel, second-hand Indian motorcycle -- same thing that the police department used for a number of years for reading meters. I bought that and started my ad on April the first. I never will forget my ad. It was: "This is no April fool's joke. We deliver anything over 40 cents free."

Now, the reason I picked the term "40 cents" was because a quart of ice cream at that time was 40 cents. Two packages of cigarettes would equal 40 cents (they was 20 cents a package). And at the end of the first week that I had the delivery service, I had to press into service my own personal car and one of my delivery boys' cars because the business grew that fast. Then by the end of the month, I had to order two new Harley Davidson motorcycles. I think I bought probably 10 or 12 of them during the time that I used motorcycles. I used high school boys and some college boys to drive these motorcycles. And I usually had anywhere from two to three in service all the time, and at

LARRISON: one time I had seven of them. But I only had five of them that was able to be on the street. The others I used for parts or to repair or they was in the shop or somethin' like that.

JW: I remember you, Lee, for your ice cream when I was a kid. The bulk ice cream, the butter pecan. You kinda prided yourself in your bulk ice cream deliveries, didn't you?

LARRISON: Well, they had a lot of funny deals back in those days that they don't have any more on account of a federal law that went through sometime during the time . . . I think it was in the [19]40's sometime when this law was passed that would not permit companies to give a discount to somebody more than they'd give to somebody else. In other words, they had to make it available, so most companies discontinued that. That hurt me a little bit on my direct buying. I'd got to a place by that time that I had good credit. I could buy direct, and I was on direct with almost all the drug companies. And then the ice cream deal . . . if you owned your own equipment, you got 10¢ off on the gallon; and then if you reached a certain volume, you got a percentage off which at the tops was 10% which made the fact that you could get a 20% discount if you owned your own equipment and reached a certain volume during the month. And I had the highest volume for a number of years of ice cream -- that counted brick and bulk ice cream -- [of] anybody in the city of Terre Haute, including all types of stores. Now, the only time I was ever beaten was one month in the summertime the Woolworth ten cent store used to put a stand up in front of their store near the door. They had brick ice cream, and they sliced it fairly thick and put it between two wafers -- graham cracker wafers . . .

JW: For a sandwich.

LARRISON: . . . for a sandwich and sold them for a dime. They beat me on volume that one month. They always had a month's sale on that. That was the only time they had that, and that month I'd usually lose the highest volume in town. Now, that was between Terre Haute Pure Milk and Ice Cream Company which later on was Borden's and the Model Milk and Ice

LARRISON: Cream Company which was a local company at that time; and that's who I dealt with.

JW: What was your clientele like when you had your drugstore back in the Depression? What kind of people frequented your drugstore?

LARRISON: Well, just mainly in your own neighborhood. Now, I was at 15th and Locust, and you know the Pennsylvania Railroad track ran through there which was a big thing back in those days 'cause there was around 12 or 13 hundred people worked out at the shops.

JW: Thirteen hundred! Where were those shops located?

LARRISON: Out beyond 25th Street and the railroad there. They had all kinds of tracks. 'Course a lot of those tracks are still out there. I think they tear out a few of 'em each year. [They] do away with them.

JW: They had a roundhouse out there.

LARRISON: Yeah. Then they repaired cars and built cars out there and everything. And it seemed as though the Pennsylvania Railroad track was sort of a barrier to me. In other words, people that lived south of the railroad track there didn't cross the railroad track comin' north to trade. But I had all the Avenues and what they called "Hunkytown" back in those days -- that was out in the northeast part of town as far as you could go. When I started my delivery business, I'd get delivery business all over the city. It was fantastic. In fact, I would say at the end of two months it was probably too much. My volume on delivery business was more than what I did in the store.

JW: You say "Hunkytown." [Are] you talking about the Hungarian section?

LARRISON: Yes.

JW: Where was that at basically?

LARRISON: In the northeast part of town from . . . I'd say from Eighth Avenue and 19th Street north-northeast. All of that was in there was mainly inhabited by Hungarians and Polish and different people like that. There was quite a few [who] lived on the Avenues between 13th and 19th [Streets] from First Avenue to Eighth Avenue, but the bulk of them lived out in the northeast end of town. They were all coal miners or railroaders back in those days. Everybody owned their own home, and they were fairly well kept up. See, all those homes out in there are all old homes today -- the ones that are still standing. There have been very few new homes ever built in that area.

JW: Lee, why did you go from tax consultant and drugstore operator to a public official? Why did you do that?

LARRISON: Well, in 1954 I realized that . . . that was when Haag's started coming into Terre Haute and different chains . . . of course, Gillises had gone out of business and given their stores to the employees for the inventory value of them -- given them all the equipment and everything to buy it. And the chain stores begin to come in here.

See, when I came in here, there was a Hook's drugstore at 7th and Wabash where there is now a parking lot. But it was very evident to me as young as I was then that something was going to happen, and in 1954 I decided to sell out. And, luckily, I sold out. I was the last drugstore (independent drugstore) in the city of Terre Haute that sold their store -- actually sold it for the name, the equipment, and the stock. All other stores since then -- after I sold out to Thurman Miller -- have been disposed of by just closin' 'em up and getting rid of what merchandise they can and taking their prescription files and stuff and sellin' them to some other druggist that was still in business. And I think Clark, who has three or four drugstores now, is probably the heir of all prescriptions that was left by Johnsons and Sipes and Neukoms and all these stores . . .

JW: George Skene?

LARRISON: . . . that I can think of. Yeah, George Skene. He was at 13th and Locust. See, I had a lot of competition when I went in. They were all older and had been there for a number of years. Johnson and Skene and Joe Ball was my main competitors. And I sorta had to wait until after they passed away and the stores reverted to a package store or a non-drugstore. Then I begin to flourish. That's when I really made my money.

JW: Skene was at 13th and Locust, right?

LARRISON: Yeah, that's right. Right across from Gerstmeyer. 'Course that hurt a lot, too, when they took Gerstmeyer away from there.

JW: Sure. Why did you choose the Republican ticket to run on?

LARRISON: Well, it was sort of a funny experience. When I sold the store in 1954, I went over to Indianapolis one day to see why my narcotic license and why my drugstore permit and things hadn't been transferred over to Thurman Miller because I had told him that I would work for him free of charge to introduce him to my customers and to get him used to the store until everything was transferred out of my name into his name. And they were a little slow.

Well, at the end of a month we went over to Indianapolis and I happened to stop past the secretary of the Pharmaceutical Association on my way in to Indianapolis, which at that time was this side of Indianapolis. And he said that he couldn't believe that I sold my drugstore because everybody in the state knew that I had a fairly good drugstore, and I'd made all the conventions and stuff like that and was quite popular with the state association. And he said, "We're not gonna let you get out of the drug business."

I told him I was gonna semi-retire and maybe do relief work, one thing or another like that. And he said there was a job open then with the Department of Health which had been created by Craig -- Governor George N. Craig.

And I said, "Well, I don't know. I haven't talked to my wife; and I don't know if I want a

LARRISON: job; and I wouldn't want a job in Indianapolis and have to move over here because I want to keep my home in Terre Haute."

So, he said, "No, it's not political" and "you wouldn't have to move over there," that "you could commute each week," and one thing and another like that. So, I didn't do anything at that time and about a week later he called me and wanted to know why I hadn't called him or seen this gentleman about the job, see, out at the State Board of Health building at 1330 West Michigan [Indianapolis].

So, I decided to go back over there then at his request. I went over and he had arranged for me an interview and everything. I knew the minute they interviewed me that I was hired if I said "yes" which I did, and I started working in . . .

I sold the store in March, and I started working a month early. I was supposed to go to work at the end of the fiscal year, which is July 1, and they called me and wanted to know if it was possible for me to come over June 1. So, I actually started working June 1, 1954, for the State.

I was not hired when the job was created, I mean when the department was created. Then at the end of Governor Craig's term [Harold W.] Handley took over; and there was more emphasis on trying to get rid of this department, because they had cabinet status with the Governor and the State Board of Health director didn't have cabinet status at that time. Actually, we was over them, and they had put us in that building due to the fact they didn't want us down at the Statehouse -- to keep us as far away from politics as they could. But it still was a political job. And finally, the legislature, which [had] created the department, de-created it at the end of Handley's term. So, I was out of work and I came back to Terre Haute.

When I came back here, it was in the first part of the year -- I'd say maybe February or March -- and right away I started gettin' calls from people like Ethel Rowe, John Schmidt. And several of the leaders in the Republican party at that time was callin' me and pressurin' me on the

LARRISON: phone to get me to run for city clerk. And I said, "I have no desire to run for any political job or anything like that. I'm satisfied with what I'm doin'." (I was working relief for Frank E. Coplan and Oakley's drugstore down at 7th and Hulman, and I was doin' relief work for Winton D. Jones and different druggists that needed to get away for a couple days to a convention or something. I'd work for them.)

So, I was gettin' all the work that I really wanted at that time. But one day Ethel Rowe called me, and I think she was the influencing factor. She said they'd all get out and work hard for me and everything and I had a chance and I was to run against John Trierweiler if I made the primary, which I did. And I'm not sure at this time whether I had a competitor in the primary or not, but anyway John Trierweiler went on the Democrat side and I was the Republican nominee. And when the election came in November, I got elected. So, I was city clerk at that time.

JW: So, city clerk was against Trierweiler?
Wasn't he sheriff one time?

LARRISON: Yeah. He'd been sheriff and he was called the old pro, and I had very little chance probably of beatin' him. But anyway, when the count was in, I had won by 487 votes. That was in 1963 in the general election.

JW: You spell Coplan, c-o-p-l-a-n?

LARRISON: Yes.

JW: Okay. How do you account for your success in beatin' out Trierweiler?

LARRISON: Well, I think it was my popularity. I'd been pretty popular on the golf course, and I was popular at bowling. And everybody in town knew me from the delivery business and my ads. And back in 1932 -- I believe it was when they started the gross income tax -- then later on people in Terre Haute begin to make a little more money, and they had to file federal taxes, see. So I got interested in federal taxes. I'd been makin' out gross income taxes 'cause a lot of people . . . I had a

LARRISON: post office substation at my drugstore. People come in there for money orders, and they'd want me to help 'em fill out their gross income tax. So by that time, I knew how to do it. And I'd fill 'em out and I'd charge them a quarter, I think it was.

And that developed into the federal . . . and I had two gentlemen -- Savage and Monaghan -- who run the Internal Revenue. They only had two men here at that time in the Federal Building. And they made out actual taxes for people. But they'd have more people up there than they could make 'em out for. So, they helped me out and taught me a few things. They used to stop past the drugstore in the evening and look at some of the returns I made and make suggestions and tell me if I was doin' 'em right and one thing and another like that. And I got real interested in it. I started making out both state and federal then, and about 1935 -- '34 or '35, somewhere along in there -- and that developed into a tremendous business itself. In fact I've seen the time when there was so many people waitin' for taxes (I made them out at a soda fountain table in the back of the store) . . . so many people lined up in the drugstore and settin' at the soda fountain stalls (which I had a big soda fountain at that time) that you couldn't hardly get into the drugstore. People couldn't hardly be served.

I know I used to get some complaints. They'd say they wondered why I messed around with them taxes and lost all my drug business, you know.

JW: (chuckles)

LARRISON: But actually, the people all came back. So I was fairly popular throughout the city.

JW: You were known throughout the city.

LARRISON: Yes.

JW: Did Republicans have many offices in the city and county the first year you took office?

LARRISON: No. They didn't have anybody. There had been some councilmen elected previously to my

LARRISON: term, but I don't recall there bein' any Republicans on the council at that time. There coulda been maybe one or two.

I know Dr. Scofield was on the council and I think Nattkemper was on there at one time. Clyde Nattkemper.

JW: Um hmm.

LARRISON: And I'm not sure of some of the other names that was on there at various times, but at that time we had some districts in the city councilmanic districts that was totally Republican, which is not true any more. In other words, the Collett Park area used to be totally Republican, and we had a southeastern section of the city was totally Republican. In fact, I think it is still heavy. That's the one that we usually elect a councilman from.

JW: As a Republican city clerk, Lee, did you have a pretty good working relationship with Ralph Tucker mayor?

LARRISON: Well, we had been friends for years. In fact, I knew him before he was ever "Man on the Street." That's when he became popular. I can remember if you would go into a small grocery store in Sandcut or Sandford or down at Farmersburg or even 50 miles around Terre Haute and say somethin' derogatory about Ralph Tucker, the Man on the Street, some woman's liable to hit you with a sack of flour or a purse, because he probably had more fans in the Wabash Valley on that radio station on the "Man on the Street" out on Wabash Avenue. He was between 6-1/2 and 7th on the south side of the street. And he probably had more fans than any dignitary ever had in the city of Terre Haute. And any radio or TV person has today. He had more following and more people that really loved that program.

JW: When was Ralph on the street with that program? Mid-'40s?

LARRISON: Well, yeah, it was either in the early '40s or the mid-'40s.

JW: And he would be there rain or shine, winter, summer, spring, fall . . . ?

LARRISON: All the time. Every day. And people, I think, come to town and trade. Of course, our trading area in Terre Haute -- people don't realize this -- runs as far beyond Bicknell in the south and almost to . . . we'd say, Indianapolis is our only competitor on the east and Chicago on the north and St. Louis on the . . . or Effingham, you might say, on the west. So Terre Haute drew a tremendous amount of customers from Illinois and southern Indiana, northern Indiana, and eastern Indiana. And I can remember back in those days when it come Saturday, you just as well not try to get through downtown (I mean on the sidewalks walkin'), 'cause people were . . . it was just crowded. Actually crowded on both sides of the street. 'Course every store was open back in those days. We didn't have any vacant lots and no . . . there was no . . . I can't recall there ever being any parking problems back in those days.

JW: No parking problems, huh?

LARRISON: I don't know why we didn't have, but I guess it was because people came, you know, more in one car. If somebody from Bicknell was coming up here to shop, they'd probably bring their neighbors or somebody with 'em.

They didn't all drive a single car like they do today. Everybody's got a car today. Back in those days they were lucky to have one car to a family even though they were only \$800 or \$900 for a Oldsmobile or a Buick.

JW: Did Ralph Tucker have any shortcomings?

LARRISON: No, he was a natural born, I would say, actor, politician, and everything all wrapped up in one. And he had an organization . . . particularly his first three or four terms, he had an organization that you couldn't possibly beat. He just had so many people workin' for him and so many people sponsorin' his campaign that it was almost impossible. As everybody knows, the number of people We ran some pretty good people

LARRISON: against Ralph at various times, and nobody was ever able to beat him. I think the closest anybody ever came was John Ennis within 54 votes.

JW: Ralph . . . then his popularity really helped him initially to be mayor?

LARRISON: Oh, yeah. I think that's one of the musts that a person has to have to get elected. He's gotta be popular with everybody. In other words, you can't have people in Terre Haute -- if you're runnin' for city office -- saying well, who is this? Is this John Doe's son, or his uncle, or who is it? They gotta be known.

JW: Who was his first opponent in [19]47 -- Ralph Tucker's? Who was the Republican candidate?

LARRISON: I'm just not sure. He ran against Ray [H.] Hahn [1959] and John [D.] Ennis [1951] and a gentleman . . .

JW: [Alfred L.] Fischer?

LARRISON: Fischer [1955] . . .

JW: Armstrong?

LARRISON: . . . and Howard [C.] Armstrong [1963]. I remember those four.

JW: I can't remember back in '47.

LARRISON: I don't remember who he ran against.

JW: What would you say were Ralph's biggest assets as mayor?

LARRISON: Well, I think he done a fairly good job probably the first three terms he was . . . the first four terms he was in there. And for some unknown reason . . . and I don't know yet today why it was, but he sort of lost his popularity in the last term; and it was pretty evident that if he ran again that he would not . . . 'Course he had a lot of illnesses in there, too. [There was] probably a health factor in there that decided for him not to run. But his popularity was 'way down, and Ralph was smart enough as a politician to know

LARRISON: that, see. And that's why he more-or-less hand-picked a person to run in his place. As he had in the past campaigns, there wasn't any doubt that his man would get the nomination, which was Don Smith. And I forget just who all run against him, but he's had some pretty strong competition in his primaries. But he always won.

JW: Um hmm.

In October of 1965, Bill Ennis, being seated as a ninth member of the common council had difficulty being seated. What was the problem there, do you remember?

LARRISON: That was a case of where we had a vacancy on the council; and, of course, the council was controlled by Republicans, but we had two Democrats in there.

That was when I was mayor. And we got together a day or two before the council meeting and decided that we wanted to put Bill Ennis in there. And we had it all arranged where somebody was gonna nominate him to take the place. It was a Democrat appointment actually. We was gonna put Bill Ennis who was a Republican in there. So, we had it all timed. When the motion was made by the council member, I was to get up immediately and they was to second it. I was to get up immediately and swear him in; and there was nothing much they could do about it, because he'd already been sworn in before anybody could say "jack rabbit," see, you might say.

JW: (laughs) So that's how you did it!

LARRISON: Yeah, that's how we did it.

JW: And it was perfectly legal?

LARRISON: Yeah, it was legal as far as that's concerned. There coulda been some problems over it, but none developed. They went ahead and seated him, and he was in there for the rest of that term.

JW: As clerk, didn't you set some records in the collection of traffic fines?

LARRISON: Yes. When I first went in as clerk, I was a little . . . like I told 'em when they asked me to run for it. I said, "I don't even know what a city clerk does or what his duties are. I don't know if I could even handle it or not." But when I got in there, it was very simple.

The main thing you did was work in the court, and you worked . . . you was the secretary to the council. On top of that you had certain things to do with traffic tickets and everything in your office, and you had to take care of parking tickets. Not when I first went in! The traffic department, or the police department, was collectin' them, and they had a lot of trouble. They didn't collect hardly any money and on a few occasions it was . . . while I was first in there, there were people in traffic department that was relieved of their job because they was apparently throwin' the dollar bills up against the ceiling. If they stuck, they belonged to the city. If they come down, why they'd put 'em in their pockets.

JW: Who was doin' this?

LARRISON: Well, some of the people that were head of the traffic department.

JW: Ooh.

LARRISON: So I got to readin' the law and I found out that the city clerk's job was to collect traffic tickets. So one day I went over and announced to 'em -- and I talked to Mayor Tucker -- and said that those should be over in the clerk's office. That I should collect them. I only had two girls in there and myself to do the work, see. But anyway, I didn't realize the multitude of the job. So anyway we argued back and forth for a week or two, and one morning I just decided . . . and I always got to work real early, before anybody else got there. So one morning as soon as the traffic department opened up and before anybody else got in their offices to speak of, I just went over to the traffic department and moved the whole thing out and moved it over to the clerk's office.

Well, right away, they got an injunction against me through the court over here at the courthouse,

LARRISON: and it was never decided. In other words, the thing was dropped. It wasn't dismissed; it was dropped. Then, eventually, I had to pay the court costs to be able to get off the hook on the deal and nobody ever pressed it from then on. And I kept the tickets in there and that's when I found out that it was gonna take my time entirely. I couldn't get out and play golf. I couldn't do a lot of things that I wanted to do maybe in the daytime -- take a day off or somethin' like that -- because it was a full-time job just recording these tickets and collectin' them.

And I did concentrate on collecting these tickets. They were only a dollar then, and people that violated the parking meter ordinance, why, I felt like they should pay. Of course, there were a lot of them that was dismissed and so forth and so on which I suppose has always been done. But the amount of money we collected was a record during the time I was in there, and I'm sure it's been broken several times since.

JW: Wasn't there some opposition to your sending out postcards to notify those who had to pay traffic fines?

LARRISON: Yes. Yes.

JW: What was the opposition? What was the outcome?

LARRISON: Well, a lot of people thought that I was wastin' money because they didn't feel like you'd collect enough of 'em to pay for the cost of sending out the mailing or anything. But later on, you know, we had a news conference. Then the news media went along with me very much on that. We would make the statement that we was gonna bring 'em into court and one thing or another like that, and usually for a week or two then your collections was real heavy, and then they'd drop off again, see.

JW: You ran for mayor in 1967 first. Did you have any primary competition in the primary? We know you ran against Don Smith, but who . . .

LARRISON: Yes. Yes.

JW: . . . was your opponent?

LARRISON: Frank McGlone was my competition in the primary; and that was probably the toughest battle I ever had in my life. In fact, even the night before the election I had no idea that I . . . whether I was gonna win or whether he was gonna win. But it turned out in the primary I won by 652 votes.

JW: Was he an attorney?

LARRISON: No. He was an accountant. He was in the Tribune Building at that time. He was an accountant.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: A "C.P.A."

JW: How were you able to beat Don Smith, Tucker's hand-picked candidate? How were you able to do that?

LARRISON: Well, I think . . . I think Don probably had to live down a lot of the things that Tucker had created his last term, you know, to get people down on him. Then I was very popular at that time -- probably more popular to the general public and the citizens of Terre Haute than Don Smith was. And I don't know how much certain things might have hurt him, but I imagine that that's probably the reason. You see he was related to Tony Hulman, and Tony had never been involved too much in local politics. He was more interested in state and national politics than locally. And when the outcome came and the general election was over with, I won by 3,914 votes. I won by a bigger majority than Tucker ever had over his Republican opponent except one time. I think one time he won by a bigger majority, and that may be the first or second time he ran.

JW: You say Tucker did some things his last term that caused him to be unpopular?

LARRISON: Well, yeah, that's what I said previously that he . . . it was evident that he would not be elected regardless of who his opponent was if he

LARRISON: ran again. [This was] due to the fact, I think, that he had let some of his friends down maybe on things that they thought he should do, you know. A mayor can't do everything, but he can do a lot of things for your friends such as pave an alley or pave a street or do somethin' like that. And over a period of 20 years, I can understand. 'Cause I think if I'd a been in there 20 years, I'd a probably had a lot of people mad at me that wasn't made at me when I got through with four years.

JW: Did Tucker, as some have mentioned, sabotage Smith's campaign because he didn't want another Democrat to succeed him even though he'd hand-picked the man?

LARRISON: No. No, I'm sure that's not true. 'No. They worked fairly hard . . . they worked fairly hard, and I would say they spent as much money on their campaign as I did on mine.

JW: So Ralph did work hard for Don Smith?

LARRISON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JW: Okay.

Did you receive support from some of those you had helped over the years when you were a druggist -- support that is in the form of campaign workers and voters -- when you ran for mayor?

LARRISON: Yes. That was one of my strong points there. In fact, I had 17 Democrat precinct committeemen, and I couldn't tell you their names at the present time. Some of them I hadn't known too well, but I had 17 Democrat precinct committeemen out of the 68 or 69 precincts in the city at that time that was definitely out working for me on the . . . you know, on the Q-T. And, of course, right before election it became evident that I had this support, see?

JW: So, if you had 17 Democratic committeemen that means that poor ol' Don Smith didn't have a (laughingly) . . . he had some rank-and-file Democrat support that had left him.

LARRISON: Well, I think Don had one thing that was against him there, you know. Terre Haute's a funny town. They're more or less jealous of somebody that's got a lot of money. And, of course, he being relation to Tony and the Smiths having a lot of money -- probably multimillionaires at that time even and more . . . but people in Terre Haute are more or less jealous of somebody like that, I think. And I think that has a tendency to hurt you, particularly in politics.

JW: How widespread was the Republican victory that year when you took office?

LARRISON: Well, I carried in the city judge or at least I think I was responsible for it. The city judge, the city clerk, and I can't remember now how many councilmen we had in there. But we had more councilmen then, I think, than . . . well, we took in all the councilmen except two, I do remember. Chernay was elected as a Democrat and Tubby Kirchner, but those were the only two Democrats on the city council during my term.

But I did not have the cooperation of all the Republican members on the council during the full four years.

JW: Chernay would be c-h-e-r-n-a-y?

LARRISON: C-h-e-r-n-a-y I think it is.

JW: And then Kirchner would be like "Larry Kirchner."

LARRISON: Yeah.

JW: Okay.

What was your first week in office like as mayor, Lee? Did people come out of the woodwork wanting favors?

LARRISON: Well, of course, you get elected in November -- the first part of November -- so I had from then on 'til the end of the year to pick some of my main department heads. And, of course, I picked Bill Rector. Well, the city was not left in too good a shape. In fact, the people that were faithful to

LARRISON: Tucker that worked for the city seemed to think that the thing for them to do was to sabotage all the equipment and do stuff like that to cause me a hard time when I went in. In fact, the anti-freeze was all out of the city street department trucks; they were empty on gasoline; there was no gasoline in the pumps. And the funny part about it was I wasn't left any money -- that I could get my fingers on -- to replace this stuff. In fact, they even took the tools, even down to a tire tool. We couldn't even change a tire on a truck out there. And it was quite a struggle. During this time I had Wm. R. Bill Rector as my city comptroller. He had been with Guarantee Roofing Company for years and was a good book man and a good auditor and a good . . . a really topnotch man for that position. But he came to me after about two weeks. The financial status of the city just worried him so bad that he came to me about two weeks after he was in office and said, "Lee, I just can't sleep at night. It's makin' me nervous. I'm losing weight, and I think I'm gonna have to resign. You're just gonna have to get somebody to replace me."

And I said, "No, Bill." I said, "Everything's gonna iron out and when we get our tax money and one thing and another in May, we'll have some money to operate on, and we'll be able to do the job. So I wouldn't worry about it."

Well, at the end of the month he came to me and told me he just had to quit because he had continued to lose weight, and he was gettin' more nervous and one thing and another. So at that time I was fortunate to get Carl Price, who had been in the brick works over at West Terre Haute . . . owned the brick company over there. He was sort of semi-retired. I don't know if he was actually lookin' for a job, but I did talk him into being city comptroller. I would say that he turned out to be the second, if not the first, best city comptroller the city of Terre Haute ever had. I'd say Ray Thomas, who was under Tucker for a number of years, would equal him. The two of them, I'd say, were the best city comptrollers in the state of Indiana at the time. They did a marvelous job.

JW: Were you ever offered bribes while you were in office?

LARRISON: Oh, yeah. That was almost a monthly ordeal that you had to go through. Several times I was quite worried about things that . . . you know, sometimes you'd get threatened if you didn't accept a bribe.

JW: With your life?

LARRISON: Yes. I know at one time the police department came out and was settin' in the alley behind my carport waitin' for me to come out to the car. And they followed me down to work for about two weeks. Then I decided that maybe it was a false alarm -- that they didn't intend to shoot me or anything like that. So I told the police I thought it was time for 'em to discontinue that.

JW: What would people want? I mean for money? If they were bribing you, what did they want?

LARRISON: Mainly contracts. I think the worst one that I ever went through and the one that really worried me and had me upset and shook more than anything else . . . and I was scared to death the night I walked into the council meeting when I had to sit up on the front desk where the judge sits along with the president of the council and the attorney. The city attorney who was George Tofaute. But I had been harrassed for about . . . you see I started in early in my campaign to get a franchise for cable TV. And I didn't realize at that time . . . not knowing anything about it, I didn't realize that the only thing I knew was that every city in Indiana that had cable TV was gettin' at least 5% or more of the gross income for a cable TV franchise. Well, the law says that anybody that operates in a city like that . . . like the bus company at that time was National City Lines. They had a franchise that paid us so much. Taxi cabs paid us so much for their stands and so much for franchise. Everybody that did business in the city using our streets and our facilities had to pay a franchise cost. So I decided that we should. Well, everybody told me that I was doin' the wrong thing because Tony Hulman was interested in the cable TV that had been put in. See, when Tucker

LARRISON: was in there, they had it before the council, and the council could never agree on a franchise. They eventually had two different companies that wanted it -- a local company here and then Tony and Time-Life, Inc. Well, due to the fact that Tony was a big stockholder in General Telephone and that he had connections there and everything, they went ahead and put in cable TV without a franchise and operated for, I don't know, three or four years probably with cable TV by using telephone lines and telephone poles and different things that he had access to that somebody else wouldn't have.

There was a lawsuit filed over this cable TV franchise, and it was eventually venued to Parke County. As far as I know today, it still has never been dismissed or disposed of. I don't know. I suppose it's inactive and the statutes of limitation has run out on it and stuff like that. But nevertheless I decided that I should have a franchise for cable TV.

I didn't want to see somebody else come in here and try to run them out of business or tell them they had to get out of the business -- that somebody else was awarded the franchise. And I didn't realize at the time that I would have people from New York, California and all over the United States come in here -- send representatives in here -- to talk to me and talk to the Board of Works in regards to this franchise. Apparently, it is a very lucrative business, because at one time I had a certain representative come in, lay \$15,000 in 100-dollar bills on the corner of the desk. I told him I didn't want to even touch it. I said, "Forget about it."

And he even told me that he would give me \$600 for each councilman if I needed 'em to vote to pass the ordinance to create the franchise for them.

JW: So you were worried about this one council meeting. Why?

LARRISON: Well, I had been threatened quite extensively over the thing, and I think it was a day or two before that I was notified that somethin' bad was gonna happen to me that night if certain ones

LARRISON: didn't get the TV franchise, see? And I'd already told my city attorney, who I mentioned was George Tofaute, that I wanted to get this thing over with, and I wanted it finalized at this council meeting, that I didn't want to prolong it any more, and that I'd gone through too much trouble, too many threats, too many this and too many that. And I was really serious with him. I never will forget when I went up to his office and told him I wanted it finalized that night. I said, "If you haven't got the papers ready, get 'em ready now and don't do anything else 'til you get 'em ready."

And he said, "What's the matter? You seem to be all shook up." And I said, "Well, I've just had somebody in there that tried to bribe me with fifteen thousand dollars to -- and six hundred dollars for the councilmen -- to throw the contract to them."

And he leaned back in his chair and sort of laughed, you know; and I said, "George, I'm serious about this. This is no laughing matter." I said, "I've been threatened terribly."

And he said, "I'm not laughin' about that. I'm laughin' at what they offered you." He said, "You know what they offered me?" They'd already been up there and talked to him I guess, and I didn't know that.

And I said, "No. What did they offer you?" And he said, "They offered me 10% in the company." Ten percent interest in the company.

I said, "Well, you didn't accept it, did you?" He said, "No. I'm too young a man and I want to stay in Terre Haute and prosper, and I'm not interested in taking any bribes like that."

And I said, "Well, thank God that I've got you here instead of somebody else that might have." See?

So it was finalized that night and, of course, Time-Life got it. And I never will forget, it was probably two or three months after that I met Tony on the street one day. And he put his arms around my shoulders and said, "Lee, I still think you done

LARRISON: the right thing and don't feel bad about it." He said, "It's the thing you shoulda done," and congratulated me and made me feel real good.

Of course, I knew Tony for a number of years before I went in as mayor. I had met him when I was in the drug business out at Fort Harrison Gun Club. Didn't even know him; that's where I met him at.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

JW: Lee, what were your feelings on prostitution when you were mayor?

LARRISON: Well, I'd been in Terre Haute since . . . and been around Terre Haute since 1929 and, as I said, went into business in 1931. At that time, there were probably . . . oh, I'd say as many as 50 or 60 houses of prostitution in Terre Haute. Of course, as State Indiana State College expanded, they done away with a lot of streets like Mulberry Street and different streets in there. Naturally, those houses were all tore down, and they went out of business. They had no place to locate so they just quit.

When I took over in the city, there was only three known prostitution houses in town, and they were all in this area that urban renewal was taking over and, of course, they had to move. And at that time, I had no reason . . . I had no reason to get into . . . I had definite plans on buildin' an overpass which I'd campaigned on; and I didn't want to get into other things that would cause me a lot of problems and more grief. And by that time I knew what the job of mayor meant, and I was wantin' to do a good job on it. So I didn't want to get involved in gambling and prostitution.

They came to me and I told them very simply. I said, "All I want you to do is run the house like it should be run. I don't want no problems down there. I don't want any criticism on my part.

LARRISON: If you run 'em right, I don't think there'll be any criticism. I don't think there'll be too much to it. And, we'll continue."

"Well, what percent do you want?"

I said, "I don't want a thing. And don't get me no whisky or anything at Christmastime. Don't buy me no Christmas presents or anything else because I don't drink whisky." (I'd quit drinking when I went into the city clerk's office 'cause I found out that you couldn't drink at night with people and socialize, go in the next morning and do the job and do it right, see?)

So anyway, I think they did get me a few gifts, you know, small stuff. I think an electric cigarette lighter one time -- stuff like that they got for me. But otherwise, we were very good friends. In fact, when I started the delivery business I had about 15 or 20 of the houses that called me for deliveries. And when the ordinary average citizen could only spend maybe \$2 and \$3 a week with me was about their limit, I would get \$10, \$12, and \$15-\$20 orders out of them maybe twice a week for cosmetics, powder, rouge. Back in those days we had all that stuff in the drug-store. And they'd call up for various items. So I had a lot of good customers there and I knew 'em all. In fact, I was in a position where I didn't feel that it was wrong for me to go past there if I did hear of a little problem or something that was created maybe the night before or somethin' like that maybe with ISU students or the police department or somebody else. I would go down and go back in the kitchen and have a cup of coffee with 'em -- whoever operated the house -- and tell 'em what the problem was and see if they couldn't handle it. For instance, I had a bunch of boys one night that tore an air conditioner out of a window on one of the houses and one thing or another like that. But anyway, when the urban renewal started takin' over and makin' them . . . you know, tearin' the houses down, they wanted to go in business. The three wanted to stay in business. So they located down . . . I think it was 1st Street or 2nd Street and on the street that goes past the office of Smith-Alsop's MAB Paints there -- all three of 'em in the one neighborhood.

LARRISON: I couldn't figure out a better place in the world for them to move to than there; so I think they made a wise solution and that's where they operated the biggest part of the time I was mayor.

JW: When you said "they" came to you and talked with you, who's "they"? The operators of the prostitution houses?

LARRISON: Yes. The owners.

JW: Uh huh. I understand the city councilman John Napier wanted to stop prostitution. Did he have much support on the council?

LARRISON: Nnno. It was pretty evident and . . . poor John, I mean he was a nice person, and I liked John. Never had anything against him, but it was very evident from the first week that he intended to be mayor in the next four years or wanted to be mayor in the next four years. In fact, we had a few words in regards to that, you know, even in an open council meeting. One night I had to call him and told him that if you want to be mayor, you'll have to run for it and get elected. You can't be mayor as long as you're on the council, and I am the elected mayor. So that ended that to a certain extent. Of course, I caused myself a little problem when I wanted to get somethin' passed.

JW: (laughs)

LARRISON: But I vetoed several bills that they passed during my four years in there, and I never had one overridden. Never had a veto overridden. Probably the only mayor in the history of Terre Haute that didn't have a veto overridden.

JW: In February of 1970 you were requested that Glen Means resign as chief of police. Why?

LARRISON: I picked Glen due to the fact that I would have picked another man who resigned shortly before the end of the year, because I wouldn't promise him. (I told everybody I wouldn't make any promises whatsoever that I didn't know I could keep.) He harrassed me for at least the entire time after I got elected up until a week or so before I took office in regards to namin' him as chief of police.

LARRISON: Now, he would have been my choice. (He later passed on; I think maybe some time during my term maybe.) But anyway, I just would not promise him that he would have that job. I said when I get ready to name the person, I'll name someone, see. And I guess he felt so . . . to such an extent that he wasn't going to get it that a week before I took office, he resigned as a policeman. 'Course he had been one several years and would have been a top-notch chief of police, I think. So I more-or-less knew Glen Means, and I thought Glen could make a good one. But I found out later that he was too easy on the men. He wouldn't correct them. He wouldn't call 'em in and criticize them for some things that they did and one thing and another like that. In fact, I could see . . . I didn't have much trouble with the police department or the fire department up until then. And the fire department never caused me any problems. I had a good chief in there, and he handled every problem himself. Very little advice did I ever have to give him.

But the chief of police I seemed to have problems on tryin' to get the police to do the things that I wanted 'em to do. In fact, I spent a lot of time with them. I was close to the police department. And I had a lot of people on there that liked me, and I had a lot of people on there that did try to do the right thing. But I had a lot of them that didn't. So, I went in one day, and I criticized the chief in regards to something -- I forget just what it was then -- and he said, "Well, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to resign and get out of here?"

I said, "It'd make me happy if you did."

He said, "Okay. You can take my resignation right now."

So, that was when I picked Ted Melvin.

JW: What remark was it that Means made about girls at ISU, wound up in Time magazine?

LARRISON: Something he said to the remark about it was a necessary evil.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: It was . . . at that time we were still in the national limelight as far as newswise on account of this Saturday Evening Post coming in here and takin' all those pictures. Some of the remarks they made, I forget . . . was that the magazine? I think it was, that had it in there about . . . nicknamed the city "Sin City" and one thing and another. See, we were livin' under the times of the "Sin City," too. And I really didn't make any effort to try to correct that. I mean that since then, they've named it "Pride City" and one thing and another. But I think the "Sin City" will stick with it as much as did the remark I made about the snow removal that time. Because every once in a while I have a State student comes over here that wasn't even out of grade school yet when I made the remark. But when they come to State, that remark passes down from fraternity brother to fraternity brother and from sorority sister to sorority sister and students pass it down to freshmen and to sophomore students, and they seem to know as much about it as I do myself in regards to the remark I made about, you know, "God put the snow here and God'll take it away."

And I ask 'em a lot of times . . . I ask 'em a lot of times, "Well, are you from Terre Haute?" And they say, "No, I come from Valparaiso," or I come from some place in the northern part of the state. And I'd say, "Well, how did you ever know about that 'cause you was too small then to read it in the paper or remember it or anything." They say, "Oh, it's common knowledge over there. Everybody talks about it. You know you're the person that's made that remark."

JW: That made you famous, didn't it?

LARRISON: Well . . .

JW: (laughingly) Around the state?

LARRISON: (laughs) Yeah. I think it did.

JW: You know I . . . as I remember, the statement by Glen Means that was quoted by Time magazine, he'd said something about if the girls at ISU would quit giving it away free, then something about prostitution; it was something that was really . . .

LARRISON: Yeah, I think that statement was made.

JW: Then there was the "Town versus Gown" lead to that article. Did you get along with Alan Rankin president of Indiana State University at that time? okay?

LARRISON: Yes. I would say we were very good friends. Now, we had a little difference on certain things. Yes. But overall for my four years I was very close to Rankin, and I think they did a tremendous job over there. I think he did and I think he felt that I was doin' a good job. Of course, the main thing that caused my problem with anybody such as him would have been the prostitution and the gambling, see.

JW: He wanted it out -- away from the campus.

LARRISON: Yes. Yes.

JW: Did you ever resolve that problem with Alan Rankin about the prostitutes near the University?

LARRISON: Well, I think I did. In other words, I made the promise to them and the council of churches and various groups that had come to me and talked to me in regards to tryin' to get rid of 'em and one thing and another like that. I told them I was involved in the Fruitridge Avenue project and I couldn't get involved in too many big things and that I would promise them anybody that passed away that was operating a house, or if something happened to it -- say it burned down or this or that or the other -- that there would be no new ones start and nobody would start another. Eventually time would take care of it and eliminate it. And that seemed to satisfy 'em for the time being, so I had no problems from then on.

JW: Where do you suppose the prostitutes went when they left the houses because of urban renewal, etc.

LARRISON: They just scattered out and went to the motels. And there were several of them acting independently. Of course, they had their pimps with them, and they'd work the taverns. Everyone'd tell 'em what room to go to and so forth and so on if they needed

LARRISON: this type of service and one thing and another. But then when I was defeated as mayor for a second term and the new mayor took over, Mayor William Brighton, why they done away with them, and they just farther scattered 'em. And I think we still got prostitution in one form or another in Terre Haute same as we've always had. Only it's more expensive; it's harder to get to, one thing and another like that.

JW: If my memory serves me correctly, you led a raid on an adult book store about ten years ago. Why?

LARRISON: Well, I was havin' a lot of pressure on me to get rid of 'em. And at that time I felt some of the stuff that they was sellin' in . . . and particularly to high school kids and stuff like that, that it should be stopped. So we tried to get the conviction on some of the worst type of pornography and stuff like that. And I think . . . I don't know. I haven't seen a book store -- or been in one since I was in office. And I don't know if it's any worse now than it was then, but some of the stuff was really bad.

JW: Going to the maintenance of parks and streets when you were mayor, how did you address basically the problem of keeping the parks the way they should be and the streets? Did you have much trouble with that?

LARRISON: No. Once we got into our budget money and had money available, we done a tremendous job in the parks. I'm sure that helped me out more than anything else. And I had a real jewel in the park department in Jerry Harbaugh. He done a fantastic job. And the nice part about it was that I always got to the office around, say, 5:30 or a quarter 'til six, and Jerry was one of these persons that, like myself, got up early in the morning (and I still do). But he always came in the office. There's very few days that he didn't come in that office every morning, and we'd discuss what was gonna be done that day and what would be done in the future and next week and that.

We had Rea Park and we remodeled the Rea Park clubhouse down there and restored the pictures of

LARRISON: Mr. and Mrs. Rea and hung 'em up on the wall. We redecorated it, repainted it, put curtains in there, fixed up the basement, fixed up everything. We had it really deluxe. That's a beautiful building. Once people would look at that building and go inside it and see it, they'd realize that the structure is there and it's gonna be there for another hundred to five hundred years. It's a well-built building, and it's a shame to let something like that that somebody gave to the city in honor of themselves to go to waste. And it was in deplorable condition when we took over.

Of course, we built the building out at Deming Park, and we kept all the parks in excellent condition as far as I'm concerned. I think the general public will all tell you that.

JW: How did you address the problem of railroads blocking traffic in Terre Haute?

LARRISON: There wasn't too much we could do on that. The railroads keep promising us they'd fix the crossing, and they never did. They'd never get to it, and eventually they might fix one of 'em.

But you always have a problem with the railroads. The railroads are a big corporation, and they pay very little attention to a small Terre Haute to them is a small city, even though we had 72,500 people here at the time. They just didn't worry too much about the crossings.

JW: A lot of railroad traffic in this city over the years, right?

LARRISON: Oh, yeah. When I took over as mayor, see, the Pennsylvania was still runnin' and the New York Central. That was all done while I was in the mayor's office -- when they combined the two and run around the north part of the city and back into the Pennsylvania lines and done away with some of the lines in there.

JW: One time . . .

LARRISON: In fact, my original overpass was planned for 7th Street. Seventh and the Pennsylvania-Big Four tracks. Then we moved it to 9th Street

LARRISON: because of a sewer underground there -- a big sewer, a twelve-foot sewer I think it was. [It] was called . . . I think it was part of the Locust Street sewer that run to the river. Of course, back in those days we had sewers that run to the river. They run east and west, and they drained into the river.

Well, sewage disposal which Mayor Tucker had built (During my term we had to build a secondary plant. Eventually they'll have to build a third addition, which is the tertiary part.) Those sewers were discontinued. In other words, they dried up. But we couldn't get under there for an underpass. And I'd found out by going to Decatur, Illinois, and checking with them that it was much cheaper to build an underpass than it was an overpass. You didn't damage as much ground, but it would have been impossible for us to build an overpass there [on 7th Street] due to the fact of all the property we'd have had to buy. 'Cause at that time the Big Four station was there, the Great Northern Hotel was there, Culligan Water Supply . . . I remember some of the prices we were gonna have to pay for some of that land. So we moved down to 9th Street. Then we ran into about the same problem there. A lot of injunctions would be filed against the city and one thing and another, so then we decided that we'd

At that time Tumpane [on North Fruitridge Avenue] was not going too well. The city had got all that land from the Tumpane plant, and we could see the industrial expansion that might happen out there. And I think everything's been sold out there now. All the land's been sold and it has developed as planned. So I'm real glad that we built that four-lane out there and put the overpass where we put it. They still use that. The railroad still uses that, switching cars and one thing and another. In fact they use it constantly.

So a lot of people . . . you know they even had cartoons in the paper of an overpass built there and no trains on the tracks, see?

JW: So that's how it got out on Fruitridge then, the overpass?

LARRISON: Yeah.

JW: Were you responsible for the "Pride City" idea? Was that your baby?

LARRISON: No. No, that come in afterwards. I think the Chamber of Commerce probably started that or some of the individuals that may have belonged to the Chamber of Commerce. They got the idea of "Pride City" and it sorta grew. I think it stayed more locally than it ever got spread out throughout the country. I know they still refer -- not as much now as they used to They don't refer to the "Pride City" or to the "Sin City" or anything else. I mean it's just Terre Haute now. I think eventually we'll live that down, but there'll always be somebody rememberin' and somebody'll bring it up.

JW: Lee, when you were mayor, didn't you have some harsh things to say about juveniles one time and didn't Judge Ralph Johnston call you on the carpet for it? What did you say and what did he say?

LARRISON: Well, I couldn't repeat the thing that was said by him . . .

JW: (laughs) Okay.

LARRISON: But he was the most feared man in my life.

JW: H. Ralph Johnston.

LARRISON: H. Ralph Johnston. He called me over here . . . I made the remarks about the H. Ralph Johnston Juvenile Center. It wasn't effective. It wasn't doin' the job. And as mayor I felt like I had a right to criticize it if I wanted to. But once I criticized it, I got a call from him; he wanted to meet me in his office.

I came over there. I was never threatened and belittled . . . in other words, he threatened to take me 'fore the grand jury and sweat every white shirt I had right off my back and so forth and so on. And he used very bad language -- language that I have used but, as a rule, I don't except when I get a little irritated.

JW: (snickers)

LARRISON: But anyway, I had very little to say because you just don't lose your cool when you're before a circuit court judge in his office. So it wasn't too long 'til something happened. I don't know what it was now; I don't remember that. But anyway, I got a call and he wanted to see me in his office. So I took two policemen. I called two policemen. I said, "I'd like for you to go across the street with me and go into circuit court. He wants to see me over there." And I said, "I want you to go in and listen to the conversation, because I know it's going to be a repeat of what I went through before."

So, when we got to the door, he said, "I asked for you to come over here and I don't want anybody else in here. Will you two policemen excuse yourself and wait in the waiting room?" So, he didn't let them in.

Then I got the same dose again. I think that happened about three times during my term as mayor.

JW: He made his point, didn't he? Did you heed what he had to say?

LARRISON: No. He demanded I make a public apology over the news media and the radio and everything. And I apologized to him. If I hurt him in any way whatsoever, I was sorry about it and one thing and another like that, but I never did publicly announce anything in regards to it. And that was sorta the end of it. It sorta . . .

JW: What were the problems? Just briefly, what were the problems you saw with the juvenile center at that time?

LARRISON: Well, they just wasn't doin' a good job. I mean I'm just not sure that they are ever gonna do a good job with it. Because at that time mainly what they did if a kid would break out panes in a school building or commit some violent crime or somethin' like that, they'd take him out to juvenile center and hand him a little book that said you should be nice to your father and mother and you should obey your father and mother, you

LARRISON: should be in bed by ten o'clock at night and so forth and so on and pat their hand and give 'em a kiss and send 'em home with the book, see?

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: A little pamphlet which I don't think done any good, 'cause we had too many of 'em that was just continually offenders. And then another thing that upset me was that my police department had to drive clear out there to take kids out there 24 hours a day. Not only did we waste a lot of time taking 'em away from their job, but we was usin' our equipment and our gasoline and everything else which I think at that time might have been 20¢ or 30¢ a gallon, which probably we'll never see again.

JW: As mayor what do you think was your major accomplishment, and what was the one thing that you didn't get to do that you wished you could have done?

LARRISON: Well, I think my major accomplishment has to be the Fruitridge Avenue overpass. I'm real proud of that and I still think it's a good thing. I'm real glad that I started it and finished it, although we didn't have it a hundred percent completed when I went out of office. It was practically completed, all except just a few finishing touches.

Now, probably my biggest disappointment was that I didn't get reelected so I could do more for the city. My own personal enjoyment was the fact that I was able to stay in there four years without ever takin' a bribe or ever doing anything that was illegal or crooked or anything like that. And I had a wonderful staff with me. In fact, I had people -- Carl Price, Tofaute, and Mr. John T. Byrne who was the city engineer -- that just went by the book strictly and that was it. In fact, if you come to me and wanted a sewer connection or wanted something done in regards to the city engineer's office, I'd go up there and go to bat for you or somethin' like that. He'd just get the book out and read it and that's the way it was. And I couldn't change it.

LARRISON: And after so long a time, I got used to that. And I'm real happy that it happened that way; because you can start doin' favors for people and the first thing you know, you're all wound up in a turmoil there and the next thing you know you're in problems. You're in trouble. So, I was thankful that we got through four years, and I think the majority of people in Terre Haute maybe stayed away from the polls thinkin' that nobody had a chance to beat me. And they just didn't go vote. Because I only lost by 700 and some odd votes.

JW: That was [19]71 against Brighton.

LARRISON: Yes. And I know. We checked up by the poll books and there was at least 2000 people in the southeastern part of the city that didn't even vote. And they were all Republican voters at that time.

JW: When you became mayor, didn't the city terminate its relations with Tajimi, Japan as its sister city? If it did, why?

LARRISON: Well, I don't think the city did. It think it was me personally that did.

Maybe I shouldn't even say this, but I think to my dyin' day I will still hold a grudge against the Japanese for the Pearl Harbor incident. Because I was in business at that time, and I know what a terrible thing it was. And I know a lot of the suffering that people went through that had people that was murdered there. And I say "murdered" because that's strictly what it was. We wasn't fightin' them. They just came over and murdered us.

JW: So, you just felt it wasn't appropriate to have a sister city . . .

LARRISON: And I resented the fact that they spent millions and billions of dollars rehabilitating the city that we bombed. We brought the people over here and doctored them. We spent money on them that way and this and that and the other. I resent that. I don't think we should've. I think when we beat somebody like we did, I think we ought to just leave it like that and let them rebuild their own country. I don't think we have

LARRISON: any responsibility goin' over there and spendin' our tax money to rebuild it and doin' all the things that we did for 'em regardless. Because I think if I was to live to be 200 or 300 years old, I think you'll see the day when a lot of those countries will go against us again sometime, you know. That's the history of 'em over there. All they want to do is fight and war and gain land and one thing and another like that.

JW: You build 'em up to have 'em come back at you again?

LARRISON: Yeah. We send all of our steel over there, and they send it back in the form of bullets.

JW: What did your administration do to really encourage industry to locate in Terre Haute?

LARRISON: I promised myself that when I got to be mayor that I felt like Terre Haute had not done enough to try to get industry in here. I'm talking about big industry like General Motors, Ford, Chrysler and a lot of companies that was doin' real well then. So, I made up my mind that I would send a hundred letters out to various companies -- IBM, this and that and the other and different companies that I could recall and think of and get their addresses and one thing and another -- and invite 'em to come to Terre Haute and look the situation over to see what we had to offer here, although at that time we couldn't give 'em free taxes for ten years like a lot of cities could. We couldn't give 'em any kind of a . . . too much of a help. We did do some things that probably was maybe not copasetic but nevertheless there was nothing wrong in it to my knowledge. And that was, for instance, when we got the chemical company out at Tumpane, the first one that went out there. It's . . . you'll have to remind me; I can't remember the name.
[Ampacet]

JW: Aah . . . we're talkin' about Visqueen.

LARRISON: No. No. It's the one that makes the plastic that colors ballpoint pens . . .

JW: Bemis!

LARRISON: No. Bemis is the one that makes other things. They're down there by Columbia Records. It's the one out there on the north -- or the east side of Fruitridge clear to the end.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: But anyway . . .

JW: (laughs) But I can't think of it. We'll find out.

LARRISON: But anyway, they came to town and the gentleman they sent in here to investigate . . . they always wanted to go to the Bamboo Inn out there for Chinese food, see (so I'm not particularly a lover of Chinese food but anyway) . . .

JW: (laughing) You've already told me that, Lee.

LARRISON: That's where we had all the meetings, see. And they were very interested. In fact, they were from the state of New York. They were unhappy with their home office there, and they said that someday that if they did locate here, they might even consider moving their entire operation here. You know, the home office. And they were very nice people to deal with. The only thing they asked me to do was . . . at that time we didn't have a sewer open there and they needed a sewer. So, we run a sewer from the sewer that run along Fruitridge Avenue. As I remember, it was on the west side of Fruitridge Avenue. We run it across Fruitridge Avenue over to their place. And we did that and they hooked onto it. I don't think they had to pay anything for that. I think the city stood the expense of that. And we got 'em in here and they've been a very good plant since.

They make concentrated . . . as near as I can describe it, it's kind of a jelly-like substance that colors plastic. In other words, if you want a ballpoint pen that's red, that coloring material comes from this plant.

JW: Um hm. You think generally then . . .

LARRISON: They had nation . . . they had international connections. They sold all over the world.

JW: You think, generally then, your administration did a pretty good job in bringing in industry when . . .

LARRISON: Yeah. During my administration it was pretty hard to get companies to move and come into another town or, you know, think about it. There's a few plants would.

Now for instance, General Food, when they came here I traveled with the chemical engineer due to the fact that I am a pharmacist by trade and I know a little bit about chemicals and particularly the water that we have in Terre Haute and the sewage disposal plant. And they sent in two or three men, and I sent the engineer out with one. They was in here for about two days. I toured the water company plant down there. That was when Mr. Mize was superintendent. He was a very good friend of mine and just would have bent over backwards to help do anything he could. He went out and looked at the site. Then we went to the water company, and then we went to the sewage disposal. And believe it or not, but at that time, when we got through with our interviews and with seeing all these facilities, he tabbed 'em as a hundred percent. He had never said anything about fluoride in the water, see. 'Course I had battled fluoride in the water from the time I was city clerk on. In fact, I was responsible for its not being put in under Tucker's administration when I was city clerk, 'cause I called a couple of councilmen in the office that night during a recess and told 'em the way I felt about it. And they went in and voted according to my convictions.

JW: Why were you opposed to fluoridation, Lee?

LARRISON: Well, because at the time I was still active in the drug business a little bit, doing relief work, and anything that had fluoride in it -- even a minimal amount of fluoride -- we had to have a prescription for. It was against the law to sell over the counter, so why would I stand as a pharmacist and let 'em put it in the water voluntarily and make you take it and everybody else take it when it was a legitimate prescription drug regardless of what amounts was in there? Didn't make any difference if it was only one-billionth of a

LARRISON: part, we still had to have a script before we could dispense it. In fact, there was a lot of things that was coming back in those days that we could not dispense over the counter without a prescription from a doctor. So naturally, I don't care whether it's fluoride or anything else, I woulda been against it.

And then I had a lot of papers. I had a flood of papers; I suppose they were a foot high from all over the United States in regards to it. For instance, I got letters from the sanitary district and the ones that control stuff like that from the State of New York. One of the cities up there had put in fluoride; it corroded their pipes and everythin' and caused them to have to replace them within a tenth of the time that they would normally have to replace their pipes. And it fouled up their equipment, their pumps and different things like that. Corrosive.

JW: What were your relations with the press when you were mayor? Pretty good?

LARRISON: I would say they were excellent. From the day I went in as mayor, I talked to several of the news media and suggested to 'em that if they would like to have a news conference each week . . . (and I think it was on Monday morning. I'm not sure but I'm sure it was on Monday morning, I believe) and they indicated that they would like to have a news conference. I don't think there was ever a Monday morning that the total news media in the city of Terre Haute wasn't there. And they seemed to enjoy it. After, oh, I'd say after a year or two it was discussed, should we make it once a month or was once a week too often? They continued to want to have 'em every week. In fact, when I was ready to retire out of the office after I was defeated in November, I was invited to the Press Club for a banquet one night. And unbeknownst to me, they had a nice plaque there with, I think, the signatures of practically every news media person in the city at that time, honoring me. And I felt real good about it. That was one of the things I pride, and I still have it hangin' in my office out at the tax office.

JW: Did you ever have any altercations with any reporters? I heard a story one time about one from the Indianapolis Star. Was there any truth to that? You told him to leave your office? Is that just a rumor?

LARRISON: No. I think that's probably true. Back in those times there was . . . back in the time I was mayor, there was, you know, a lot of bad articles appeared in the Indianapolis paper. And it seemed as though the Indianapolis paper was sort of takin' picks on Terre Haute. I resented it to a great degree since I was mayor and felt like I was in a position to be the one that should resent it and say somethin' about it, see.

So, when they came in here and hit me with certain questions and tried to trap me into sayin' things that you didn't . . . particularly would /not/ have said under normal conditions, I just told 'em to scoot out and forget about it, see.

JW: Would they leave then when you told 'em to get out?

LARRISON: Most of the times I think they did.

JW: Gerald Loudermilk, now chief of police, was disciplined by you, put on a street beat. Why?

LARRISON: Due to the fact that he was in the television repair service then. (I don't even know if he knows this but I suppose he does.) But anyway, he went out to one of my very good sponsors, /who/ had called on me for at least 30 years in the drug business, not only while I was in business personally. He had called on me from the day one when I went in up until I retired or sold the drugstore and then at various stores I worked at. And he was a real fan of mine. And he /Loudermilk/ went out to repair his television due to the fact that he was a neighbor of John Trierweiler, and Trierweiler told him to get ahold of Mr. Loudermilk to do this TV. Well, he went in there and the minute he went in . . . I don't know why he had this in mind or why he said the things he did, but anyway he was derogatory to me and didn't think I was a good mayor. /He/ said bad things about me and everything and this guy came down to

LARRISON: the office the next day just as mad as he could be and wanted to know what I was puttin' up with and why I didn't do something about it and this and that and the other. So I decided that . . . you knew we used to have walkin' beats and . . .

JW: Sure.

LARRISON: . . . they used to come past the drugstore at night. They walked day and night back in those days. So anyway, that's what it ended up. But I might say that that's all been forgotten about I'm sure. He's a very good friend of mine today, and I'm a very good friend of his. I'd help him out in any way I could, and I'm sure he'll do the same thing for me.

JW: That's great.

LARRISON: It's one of those things that you can get mad at somebody and you can do certain things and still be friends.

JW: Water over the dam.

LARRISON: It's water over the dam. That's right.

JW: As mayor, how did you personally challenge crime in the city? What steps did you take to really combat it?

LARRISON: Well, I felt like you had to be stern and firm about everything. And I'll never forget, it was my idea to start this riot squad. We had forty of the topnotch policemen that joined this riot squad, and we outfitted 'em with the shield and the helmet and riot equipment that they needed and everything like that. And they actually went down in the basement on their own time and trained, and they had a leader. One of the policemen that was in the outfit was the leader. And they studied. At that time, we built that building down there with the classroom in down there, and we had all the latest photography equipment. We had all the latest speaking equipment in there. So it was an ideal classroom situation to be able to teach people how to handle a riot and one thing and another. We'd had problems over at ISU. And when the thing broke out over there at the twin towers down on 9th Street, you know, why naturally they were all

LARRISON: called together. I never will forget that night. I went down there and stayed with 'em. And my parting words to 'em was When they got ready to leave to go over there . . . we were to wait until they called us. We knew the trouble was gonna start. We probably anticipated more correctly than what the university did. But they was to call us, and that was the agreement I had with the university -- that I would not interfere over there unless they called us, see. But we got word real quick 'cause we had scouts over there. We knew what was happenin' and what tension was building up and everything. When we felt it was necessary to go in without them calling us, that's when we sent 'em over there. My parting word with them was to not get hurt themselves, to take care of their own bodies, and if they had to, shoot to kill.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: Now, I was the third mayor in the United States that was supposed to have made that remark, and I'm sure they did. That was the Evansville mayor and Mayor Daley in Chicago, in the case of riot. When they got over there, they was tearin' up quite a bit of the building, done quite a bit of damage. I think there was a lawsuit over it with the State and one thing and another went on and nothing ever happened about it. I don't know how the end came out.

But anyway, I'd say within five minutes my riot squad stopped it because they went over there with the intent that they was nobody gonna defy 'em, and that's exactly what I wanted them to do.

JW: They didn't have to fire a shot, did they?

LARRISON: I don't believe they ever did. They used a lot of tear gas and one thing and another like that.

JW: That was about 1969, '70?

LARRISON: Somewhere in there. April 23, 1970

JW: Yeah. I remember the night it happened.

LARRISON: Yeah. Some of the incidents that happened in the State was when they tore down the flag there in the center of the university and one thing and another like that. We didn't get involved in some of those things. We let the campus police . . . 'course the campus police at that time was not as large as it is now, and we felt like we needed to assist them and help 'em. We did in every way we could.

JW: Nineteen seventy-one you ran again for mayor, of course. You were defeated by Bill Brighton; you've already talked about that to some degree on the tape. Just how serious of a problem was absentee ballots in that 1971 defeat?

LARRISON: Well, of course, that was back in a time when they could anticipate how many votes certain people might be getting beat by or how many they might win by and one thing and another like that, and they had me tabbed as about a 1500 to 2000-vote winner in that election. So I'm sure, and I have definite evidence from a person that was involved in it who later on turned to be a real good friend of mine. He was involved in this, and he's the one that personally told me (he's deceased now so he can't make any answers or answer any questions) . . . All I can do is repeat what he told me, but he told me that they anticipated I would win by a thousand to fifteen hundred votes so they changed at least two thousand votes here at the courthouse which was . . . You've heard about the tea kettle that they steamed the envelopes open with. Well that was a misnomer, because I don't think they had to use a tea kettle. 'Cause when I get in here . . . I'm a little bit of an investigator myself, and I don't like to believe every story I hear that you can open envelopes, such and such, or you have to steam it open. You have to do this. So I took a few of 'em and sealed 'em up and seen how hard it was to open 'em up and if you could possibly put 'em back so they'd be unnoticed. And it was very easy. The bottom tab on 'em, you could just pull it right open and take the ballot out and put a new one in there.

And the city clerk, I mean the county clerk, was the only one that had the actual, official ballots. And that was when I initiated the fact . . . when I got over here, I initiated the fact that I put that little bolt on that door so you couldn't

LARRISON: take the hinges off and open it. I put a big master lock on it plus the regular door lock, and I had those shelves built (pointing) that you see right there to put all the official ballots in there. And nobody ever had access to 'em but me and my deputy clerk.

JW: Who was county clerk then? During that election?

LARRISON: Bill Brighton.

JW: Bill Brighton. So he was not only county clerk, but he was running for . . .

LARRISON: He was runnin' for mayor and I was mayor and runnin' for mayor again.

JW: Hmmm. Was there bitterness between you and Bill Brighton?

LARRISON: No. I would say not. He was very seldom in here. In fact, I didn't even know him very well. He was a hard man to see. He was a hard man to see even when he was mayor. In fact, I was never in his office when he was there during the whole eight years he was in there. I saw him and talked to him maybe in the parking lot, something like that. But he was a different kind of a mayor than most mayors are, you know. I'd ask him somethin' about what happened in the police department or the fire department and he'd say, "Well, you'll have to see Jim Swift or the chief of the fire department. I turned that over to them and they run it. I don't have nothin' to do with it; I don't know a thing about it."

JW: He delegated it . . .

LARRISON: I think that . . . I think that was true. I think he was tellin' me the truth.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: I don't think he got involved in it enough.

JW: Wasn't Bill Brighton . . . when he ran, wasn't he the reform candidate of the Democratic party and then he turned sour in the opinion of some

JW: Democrats? Wasn't he supposed to be the reformer? I've heard people, reporters around here, talk about Bill Brighton

LARRISON: Well, yeah, I think at that time they thought that they had developed somebody that could make a success as mayor and maybe later on run him as governor. I think he had aspirations to be governor, and I think there was a lot of them in Terre Haute that thought that he might make a mayor, but I think he sorta fizzled out on that.

JW: Do you think one of Bill Brighton's problems might have been that he surrounded himself with the wrong people?

LARRISON: I think that was one of his problems. Then he had a drinking problem, too.

JW: Why was Hugh McQuillan so successful against Ralph Berry for circuit court judge in [19]76? It was by 10,000 votes, I believe, that he beat Berry. And yet Berry was a tough campaigner and had a lot of clout, but McQuillan beat him. What happened there?

LARRISON: Well, I think all of the Republican candidates that have been successful in general elections in the last 10 or 15 years -- particularly since I got elected as city clerk and then mayor -- I think all of them have gone in when there was against situation of the Democrat party against their candidate.

Now, I'll agree that I ran at an opportune time when people were down on Tucker. They were down on the man that he picked regardless of who it would have been -- you or anybody else. They would not have been happy with his choice. So I had a fairly easy deal there. It didn't seem like it, and you never think you got that. But they was down on Berry. There was a certain . . . the party was split [between] maybe two factions at that time. And one faction was fightin' the other one. And they were down on Berry and they were determined to beat him. It wouldn't have made any difference who their candidate woulda been, particularly if it was Berry. They was gonna beat him.

LARRISON: And I think the same thing happened this time. You can see we only got two offices this time and in both cases, they were against The Democrats, the majority, the oldtime Democrat that vote Democrat and are religious Democrat, were originally (I'd say three months ahead of the election, general election) were against Schoffstall. They were against Brentlinger, and they were against Bitzegaio. At the last minute -- and I don't know who was responsible for it -- at the last minute they all agreed they would cut Schoffstall off, but they wanted them to vote for Bitzegaio and Brentlinger. But there wasn't enough of 'em felt like switchin' then in the case of Bitzegaio, and he got beat in the long run. And in the case of Brentlinger, he got elected. I think probably the letter that his mother wrote and was advertised in the paper might have been more helpful to him than anything that he did.

JW: So, how are you relating this then to Ralph Berry and Hugh McQuillan?

LARRISON: Well, they was down on Ralph Berry at that time, and the bunch that was fightin' him got in power for a short time. And now then it's the old Berry gang that begin to get back into power, and they're still split. In fact, they're split three different ways.

JW: So, in other words the Democratic party had to do Ralph Berry in.

LARRISON: Yeah.

JW: For Hugh McQuillan to win?

LARRISON: I think so. Now, they may not agree with me on that, but I'll admit that See, when I was campaigning for city clerk, I learned a lot as far as politics [is concerned]. I was never that active in politics before; but nevertheless, as I went around, they was an awful lot of people that said bad things about my competitor and indicated to me that they would not vote for him. And they were Democrats because at that time, and even now, I know twice as many Democrats as I do Republicans because they outnumber us two to one, maybe.

JW: Um hm.

LARRISON: So naturally I'm gonna know a lot of Democrats. And I grew up with the drugstore and the tax business and everything else right in a solid Democrat neighborhood in the Seventh Ward, right on the border of the Seventh Ward. In fact, the Seventh Ward took in my entire trading area, you might say, plus what I picked up throughout the town.

END OF TAPE

TAPE 2

JW: Why was Zwerner of the Housing Authority fired when you were in office?

LARRISON: Well, he was a carry-over employee in that position that was appointed by Tucker when that Housing Authority started, the HUD thing. And it seemed to me that I was gettin' too many complaints from people, particularly if they were Republican or if they hadn't been for the administration and one thing and another. He was sorta neglectin' 'em, passing them off on the list, and not givin' them housing down there; and they was maneuverin' 'em around and one thing and another like that. And I felt like I would be better off -- due to the fact that there was quite a number of people in that area, you know, living there -- that I'd be better off if I got somebody that's more favorable to me. Not that I intended . . . 'cause in my entire lifetime I've only put one person . . . one family, did I put in the Dresser housing or was responsible for getting in there.

JW: Your last year in office as county clerk, why have you been so rough on the county council at times; namely, in one case getting back at them by cashing in C.D.'s [certificates of deposit] and the county losing the interest?

LARRISON: Well, to explain that, we did not have to go into the 4 D program, which is a federally-funded program through the State of Indiana. All the

LARRISON: money that we collect from men whose wives are on welfare, when we went into this program, we send that money to Indianapolis. They keep that money in that office -- the welfare department over there -- to operate their office and hire the extra help it took them to do the 4D program. In turn, they came to us, and they tell us that they're gonna pay part of my employees. In other words, they figure out the schedule. I didn't have nothing to do with that. They gave me 75% of my head person in the support desk; 75% of her salary they refunded to the county. Now then, we was to get that money back, but it had to be by council action. They are first . . . and I went down and explained to the council how this thing worked.

On top of that the county got a certain amount of money which I think is larger than the amount we got. This 75% that we got on her salary was to buy equipment and stuff that we would need extra to operate the 4D program and the extra help we'd need. So, that amounted to approximately \$2,000 a month that I was to receive, not directly but through the council. But it would come through the general fund to the auditor's office, plus the amount that the county got. I explained to 'em what it would mean to the county for me to go into this 4D. I could voluntarily quit it anytime I want to.

At the same time, there was a law passed by the legislature which was never a law previous to the last year-and-a-half. It was that the county clerk who has over a quarter million dollars in unused money down in the checking account, due to the fact that a lot of people have died that we've mailed checks to and they've been returned to us They're still here; the money's in the bank. A lot of checks get lost; they're never cashed. And it just built up over a period of years 'til now it's in excess of a quarter million dollars. That's in surplus money down there in a checking account.

They passed a law . . . when the legislature found out that that had happened in 92 counties in the state of Indiana, they passed a law permitting the county clerk to do the same thing that the treasurer and other collection agencies of county government did. He could invest the surplus

LARRISON: money they had. So, I went to the auditors and to the State Board of Accounts and asked them to check my records and see what they thought I could safely put in C.D.'s. And at that time, it was a fairly high rate of interest. And they suggested that I could put in anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000 -- maybe \$200,000 -- in C.D.'s and not hurt my cash flow that I would need. A lot of this builds up on \$1,000 cash bonds, and there's any number of things in here that we receive money for, and we deposit it, write a receipt for it, that the money is never dispatched. Each ten years -- and that happens every year -- when that money gets to be ten years in our possession, then we have to send it to the state and the state gets it.

So, I went down and invested \$150,000 which would have given us \$17,000 and some odd dollars in interest money for the year. I told the council about it and asked 'em if they'd be more favorable to me and give me some of this money that we had comin' to us due to the fact that I was playin' ball with them and giving them extra income that they wouldn't have got otherwise.

The first thing that happened . . . that was the only time I ever appeared as my own representative from the office. Prior to that my deputy clerk had always gone to the council meetings. I never did go to the council meetings.

I went down there and explained to 'em how desperately we needed this money for a part-time helper which we only pay \$3.00 an hour and the going rate minimum wage is \$3.10 an hour at that time (I understand it's goin' up again the first of the year) \$3.00 an hour and one in here. So, I asked for money for this extra help, and they turned me down 100%. So I said, well, I'll fight fire with fire because I've always done that and I will still continue to do it to my dying day.

So, I just went down and cancelled them out about a month and a half after they're in there. Well, you know what happens. You lose all your interest. You don't get any.

JW:

Sure.

LARRISON: Brought it back and put it in the checking account. So then I threatened to get out of the 4D program. Well, I forget who the councilman was; but the auditor, Frank Walker, and a couple of councilmen came down here and begged -- practically on their knees -- for me not to get out of the 4D program. They said that they would do better and this, that and the other. They thought that I could get a little of the money that I might need for this, that and the other. Well, I think it was three months ago We had three months to go when we figured out that for two part-time half-time employees -- one out to the juvenile center and one here, which is all involved in the 4D program -- it would take \$5,000. At that time, we had better than . . . between \$3,000 and \$4,000 that they had got credit for that I had never used because they wouldn't give it to me. So, I asked for \$5,000 which we'd have more than that by the end of the year and that's all we wanted 'til the end of the year. Well, they turned it down completely. After the council meeting was ready to adjourn, Tommy John got up and said, "I think we ought to reconsider Larrison's request for \$5,000" and said, "I'll make a motion that we give him \$3,000." Why he picked three thousand, I don't know.

Well, Charlie Fouty got up and said . . . (They got no second to it.) Charlie Fouty got up and said, "Tommy, if you will make an amended motion for . . . do away with that motion and make a motion for \$2500, I'll second it." So he did. He rescinded his first motion, made a second motion that was \$2500. Charlie Fouty seconded it, and it went through unanimously. I got \$2500. And that's all I got. So, we've only got one extra girl 'cause I couldn't hire two on that. If I did, I would only get 'em a month-and-a-half, see.

So, I've always felt the council . . . the council has been against me ever since I was in here.

JW: Why?

LARRISON: I think mainly because I'm a Republican. I have a hard time gettin' space here. If I did get an extra girl, I wouldn't have any space to put

LARRISON: her in. I'm cramped for space. We've got too many records up on the fifth floor that we have to run back and forth up there to get. It kills a lot of my time. Takes a lot of time of my girls' time. They could be doin' desk work if they didn't have to run up there and search for things. Now in the last year I'd say, they've had a tremendous success up there by hiring Mr. Tapy. He not only finds it for us, he brings it down to us; and my girls don't lose a minute's time. They work right on through, see.

JW: Why did you so adamantly challenge Clyde Lovellette's residency when he ran for mayor a couple years ago -- a year-and-a-half ago?

LARRISON: Probably due to the fact that I thought it was illegal in the first place. In the next place, he was the one, when I was mayor, that him and Jim Swift had led the raid on the prostitution houses unbeknownst to me when I was out of town.

JW: Down in Florida.

LARRISON: And he never did cooperate with me. He was always against me due to the fact that I didn't name Jim Swift as chief of police when he wanted me to. Him and Jim were real thick for some reason or another. I don't know why. So I just thought well, if he's done somethin' illegal here and I got the chance, I'll whack him back and get even with him now. I still operate on an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

JW: Larry Lidster. You didn't support him in the [19]79 primary. Why?

LARRISON: Well, I did, I think, at the last there. Of course, before he got into the race, I had committed myself to [Bill] Haldt so I stayed with him. I don't change my mind that easily. If I tell somebody I'm gonna support 'im, that's what I do. I support 'em. And I didn't have any chance of supportin' Lidster in the primary, but I did support 'im in the fall.

JW: How much influence did the Hulman family have on politics here during your lifetime?

LARRISON: I would say, to my knowledge, they never contributed. If they did, it was done in a round-about way that nobody knew about it. But I would say that the Hulman family was never an influence on local politics as much as a lot of people give 'em credit for. You know, a lot of people on the street . . . and I would hear these remarks a lot of time about some of the things and this and the other, which I never did believe. Because actually they're real good friends of mine, and they've always treated me right. I used to deal with Hulman & Co., and I wouldn't want a finer company in the world to deal with. And Tony was always kind to me. It didn't make any difference if I was in Indianapolis, Cincinnati, or where I was at, and I run into him. He always recognized me, spoke to me, and was real friendly. And I don't think . . . now as far as politics, if he did play any politics whatsoever -- and I'm sure he did -- it would be statewide or nationwide. Of course, he was the type of man, you know, that didn't have to depend on Terre Haute as much as Terre Haute depended upon him. And I think that's a thing that a lot of people in Terre Haute don't realize. We depended on Tony Hulman more than he depended on us. And I would say that there's very few people in the history of Terre Haute that's ever done more for Terre Haute than he's done.

JW: Al Kamhi, an unusual fellow, a student at Indiana State, what effect did he have on one of the mayoral elections, and I can't remember which year it was?

LARRISON: I think he probably took some votes away from me. Running as an independent, I think he probably took some votes away from me. But I don't believe that if I'd a got my share of 'em . . . probably I would not have got elected anyway.

JW: That was 1971, right?

LARRISON: I think it was. Yes.

JW: I-70 and Honey Creek Square, as they went up, did you oppose or support those two things?

LARRISON: No, I supported 'em except for the fact that I was very good friends of the person that was managing Honey Creek Square; and the only thing

LARRISON: that I got involved in, you might say, to any extent was the annexing of that area down there. And they came to me, being good friends. I bowled with the gentleman, and I've played golf with him. They were from Evansville, but he had been here in the National Air Guard; and I got acquainted with him due to that fact. I did his taxes year after year and one thing and another like that all during the time he was here . . .

JW: Who was that?

LARRISON: Smitty. Smith. He married the daughter of the man that owned Honey Creek Square at that time. I think since it's changed ownership.

JW: Do you remember his first name?

LARRISON: No, I don't.

JW: Um hm. Okay.

LARRISON: But anyway, I haven't seen him now for two or three years or four years. But anyway, they came to me -- he and his father-in-law -- and said that they would not be against being annexed down there, except they would like to wait until they got all the buildings built that they was goin' to on this plot of ground they owned down there that they bought. And once they got situated and got everything built, then they'd be interested in goin' in and gettin' the city services and city facilities that was available to 'em.

So, I said that's fine. When you get ready to be annexed and you wanta be annexed, you let me know. And I think they're still of the same opinion. I think they could be annexed once they get through, but they're still developing down there -- as you know. They still got some land down there that they could put things on. They've got the what? The racquet club down there, tennis thing. They've got a housing thing in the rear there, and there's a lot of expansion could be done down there. I think they're the people that will do it.

JW: Last question, Lee. You were talking to me -- myself and Martin Plascak -- a couple of weeks ago about a terminal. I believe it was at 13th Street

JW: and Wabash. And you talked about coal trains that took the miners out to the mines that went up along the Tecumseh road. Share with us about that, will you?

LARRISON: Well, at that time you had the interurban and the streetcars that run right down the center of Wabash Avenue. In fact, the center of all the streets -- Locust Street and the various track that they had in the city. But your stop-and-go signs was always out on the little platform that you stood on waitin' for the streetcar to come past. And traffic went to the right of that, see. Your eastbound traffic went to the right of that, and on the westbound traffic it went to the north of this little island built out there with a stop sign there.

And 13th and Wabash was the terminal and the meeting place of all the streetcars that came together with people from all over the city that worked in the coal mines. And from there they transferred onto the streetcar that took 'em up on 19th Street and up to Maple Avenue to the place where the train met all of 'em. And they'd get off the streetcar there and got on the coal mine trains that went to the various mines that they worked at. And nobody . . . nobody drove to the mines then to speak of. They all rode streetcars and the train, 'cause every coal mine had a train that run to it for their employees, see. And they brought 'em back in in the evening. That was sort of a terminal at 13th and Wabash. And Al Neukom had that drugstore at that time, and he opened up at five o'clock in the morning just to sell 'em carbide and tobacco, chewing tobacco, smoking tobacco, cigarettes, and one thing and another like that -- and maybe a few drug items, but very few.

JW: Those trains . . . in other words, each mine had its own tracks leading from the mine to a main line?

LARRISON: Yeah. I suppose there was some tracks. I wasn't quite that familiar with 'em. I suppose there was some tracks that probably, maybe, went past another mine, that dumped them off there and then went on to another. But there were several tracks in the northern part of the county that

LARRISON: run to different mines, see. They all had to have railroads that run to 'em to haul their coal, because we didn't have trucks then. The only trucks we had then was little ton-and-a-half trucks and stuff like that. I know I had a stoker. I hand-fed my furnace for . . . probably I had a steam boiler in the drugstore building which heated the whole outfit there at the time. And I used to buy, you know, coal from the mine and the going price for coal back then Then when I put in a stoker, I bought stoker coal which was more-or-less dirt and coal screening mixed together. And it was a dollar a ton, and it cost me a dollar a ton to have it hauled in. A guy could haul five ton; it cost me \$10 for a load of coal.

JW: So, when did these trains peter out that went to the mines? In the '30s, they stopped running them?

LARRISON: Yeah, when the mines started closin' down, was worked out. Some of 'em filled up with water and one thing and another like that. And none of 'em were operational. I can't tell you what year it was that they went down, but it seemed as Well, they went down a long time before the railroads did -- 'fore the shops closed out here. See, the shops started layin' off, discontinuin' and quittin' out here; and just all of a sudden, we lost 1200, 1300 jobs out there. See, they used to have a gym over there at the corner of 13th and Spruce next to where Phillips had a bulk gasoline station. I can't think of the gentleman's name that run that bulk station there, but anyway the gym was just a little bit west of there on . . . it would be Spruce Street. And I used to go over there and bowl with some of the railroaders back in the early '30s. They had two bowling alleys in there. It was sort of a recreational . . . they called it the Pennsy Gym. I 'spose there was a lot of amateur boxers that got their training there, because it was just a regular gym that the Pennsylvania sponsored there. But the general public used it to a certain extent.

JW: What'd these coal trains look like?

LARRISON: They were just regular coaches of the older vintage that wasn't suitable maybe to run on the

LARRISON: mail line for passengers. That was back in the days when they'd go on strike if they didn't have warm water in the wash house. . . what'd they call 'em? I can't . . . I forget. But anyway, it was a shanty house that was at each coal mine, where the men changed their clothes and stuff and put on their hats and carbide lamps and everything to go down in the mine, you know. If they didn't have running hot water in there or somethin' to that effect or didn't have clean towels or somethin', the guys'd decide to not work that day. And they'd all get on the train and come back home. (laughs)

JW: (laughs)

LARRISON: And all the sporting goods stores . . . or not sporting goods but places like the Combination and Jensen Brothers -- all them had a big black-board up there and you could go in there in the evening around five, six o'clock and they had the schedule up there. They would call and find out what mine was gonna operate tomorrow. Then they had the schedules up there of what the working hours was for every mine.

JW: This was the Combination cigar store?

LARRISON: Yeah. Combination . . . that was run by Gene Roach's dad at the time, and Gene worked in there. Gene's still alive.

JW: This side of Wabash between 7th and 8th, right?

LARRISON: It was between 8th and 9th . . .

JW: Eighth and 9th.

LARRISON: Yeah. And Jensen Brothers was down east just a little bit farther. And then there was the Wabash Cigar Store and different ones and they all had bulletin boards in there, you know, as to the mine trains -- when they'd run, and what mines was gonna be open, what mines wouldn't, see. Because if they'd have a breakdown, they always had it posted there. And the miners'd go in there to buy baseball tickets and play a little pool and play rum and cards, and they all looked at that. That's back when business was real good

LARRISON: on Wabash Avenue and from 9th Street to, I'd say, 3rd Street -- long time before 3rd Street was ever developed. Third Street was like a cow path at that time.

JW: Lee, we've pretty well run out of questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to comment on before we close this tape out? Anything we think we've forgot that we should have mentioned?

LARRISON: No. I think I pretty well told my life story.

JW: Yeah. I think it's pretty good.

Thanks a lot.

END OF TAPE

INDEX

- Absentee ballots, 46-47
 Annexation, 56
 Berry, Ralph, 48-49
 Bribes, 23-25, 37
 Brighton, William, 32, 38, 46-48
 Byrne, John T., 37
 Cable TV, 23-25
 Chamber of Commerce, 35
 City clerk, 11-13, 16-18, 41
 Coal mining, 57-59
 Collett Park area, 13
 Combination Cigar Store, 59
 County clerk, 50-54
 Department of Health,
 Indiana State, 9-10
 Depression, 3-4, 7
 Downtown, 14, 59-60
 Drugstores, 2-9, 11, 57
 Ethnic groups, 7-8
 Hungarians
 Polish
 Ennis, William, 16
 Fluoridation, 41-42
 Gillis drugstores, 2-3, 8
 Grocery stores, 3
 Harbaugh, Jerry, 32
 Honey Creek Square, 55-56
 Hulman, Tony, 19, 23-26, 54-55
 "Hunkytown," 7-8
 Indiana State University, 29-30, 44-46
 Industry, 34, 39-41
 Jensen Brothers, 59
 Johnston, H. Ralph, 35-36
 Juvenile Center, H. Ralph
 Johnston, 35-37
 Larrison Pharmacy, 2-9, 11-12, 27, 58
 Loudermilk, Gerald, 43-44
 Lovellette, Clyde, 54
 McGlone, Frank, 19
 McQuillan, Hugh, 48-49
 "Man on the Street," 13
 Mayor, 16, 18-47, 50
 Means, Glen, 28-30
 Miller, Thurman, 8-9
 Napier, John, 28
 Overpass, 26, 33-34, 37
 Pennsylvania Railroad, 7, 33, 58
 Pharmacist, 1-11
 Politics, 11-56
 Price, Carl, 22, 37
 "Pride City," 30, 35
 Prostitution, 26-28, 31-32, 54
 Railroads, 7, 33-34, 57-59
 Rankin, Alan, 31
 Rea Park, 32-33
 Rector, William R., 21-22
 Riots, 44-45
 Rowe, Ethel, 10-11
 Schultz Weinland Drugstore, 2
 "Sin City," 30, 35
 Skene, George, 8-9
 Smith, Don, 16, 18-21
 Streetcars, 57
 Tajimi, Japan, 38
 Tax consultant, 11-12
 Terminal Arcade, 56-57
 Thomas, Ray, 22
 Tofaute, George, 23, 25, 37
 Transportation, 7, 14, 33-34, 57-59
 Trierweiler, John, 11, 43
 Tucker, Ralph, 13-17, 19-20, 34, 48
 Urban renewal, 26-27
 Wabash Cigar Store, 59
 Woolworth, 6
 Wright, Arthur Shel, 2